

SEABEE BIOGRAPHY

I like to think that it all began when I dropped out of high school. I choose this point in time in hopes that it will discourage other young men from making that same dreadful mistake. But at that time, the summer of 1965, I was 19 years old and too full of raging hormones to think of anything else except satisfying that biological urge.

I had a job delivering groceries for \$50 bucks a week (*\$42.08 after taxes*). I drove my girlfriend to the Drive-In movies every weekend in a 1948 Plymouth. What more could a man want? I was oblivious to the fuzzy images of the war that streamed through the television sets into American homes. The Selective Service had classified me as "1-A." Then summer waned and the fall arrived. In early November came a letter in a drab brown envelop from the United States Army. "You are hereby ordered to report .. ."

Damn, I been drafted! I thought. The Army was sending people to Vietnam. As is still the case, I always had the lyrics of a song running through my mind.

"Fighting soldiers from the sky. Fearless men who jump and ... What?"

"No way!": I thought Army uniforms are the color of stagnant frog piss.

"I'll just run off and join the Navy instead". So on November 18th 1965, I raised my right hand and was inducted into the United States Navy. My recruiter told me that I could work in Intelligence! I didn't know much about Intelligence and certainly didn't have much of it, but it sounded cool.

I guess there were maybe twenty or thirty of us - strong, healthy young men. In no time at all we found ourselves on a plane bound for Chicago. We were also quite loud and full of silly laughter. The fact is we were trying to disguise our own insecurity about the future. We were many things but above all, we were scared.

Two o'clock in the morning - the silliness had given way to fatigue. We were herded off the plane and on to a bus. At some point I staggered to the front of the bus. /tHey driver, I heard when we get off this bus we still have to catch a train." His response:

"Kid, when you get off this bus you ain't gonna catch nothin' but he/l!" He was right. We were rushed through Boot camp. Six short weeks of what seemed like an eternity. While there I had been given another classification of N.Q.S~D.N.D which must have meant *"Nonqualified Swimmer - Damn Near Drowned."* I guess it didn't matter. The war was on and I graduated from Boot camp thinking that I must be the only sailor in the world who can't swim. Perhaps, just maybe that's how I ended up in a unit that I had never heard of before. After the graduation drill, the Commanding Officer of Company 707 barked out our assignments and orders. "Seaman Glenn Williams," "Yes Sir!" "Seabees! Report to Davisville, Rhode Island."

What's a Seabee? Guess I was about to find out. And where the heck is that recruiter? We were only in Rhode Island for a few months before being sent to Gulfport, Mississippi to re-open an old Navy base that has been inactive for years. It looked like an abandoned ghost town. The barracks sat up on cinderblock pillars. Weeds were growing up through the floors. There was work and training and more work and more training. Then came the day when MCB 62 was a recommissioned battalion. We got to march on the grinder in our bright white Navy dress uniforms and the thunderous sound of a marching band playing "Anchors Away!" I couldn't have felt more proud.

But the dress uniforms had to come off and the work clothes were a staple of daily fashion. And soon we were wearing combat fatigues, ammo belts stepping out to the rhythm of a marching cadence. We set up bivouacs in Hattiesburg, Ms. and played war games in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The marching broke down to a stealthy approach through the thicket of fall foliage. As always, a tune played in the back of my mind. *"Everyday is the same routine of cigarettes and magazines ... "* Soon we boarded the planes, trains and buses to visit our families for what may have been the last time. MeB 62 had orders for Vietnam. *" ... And each town looks the same to me, the movies and the factories and every strangers face I see reminds me that I long to be ... Homeward Bound!"* Simon and Garfunkel were going strong.

But we were just going - and it wasn't home. Instead, we were crowded in the back of a Hercules C-130 cargo plane. For the next twenty-six hours the Sea bees smoked, played cards, slept while the plane flew to the West Coast. From there we hopped from island to island - Hawaii, Wake, Midway Guam. I slept to escape the drone of the four propeller engines. I wasn't fitting in very well. I didn't smoke, drink or play cards. And I wasn't from the South. I had not avoided Vietnam by joining the Navy. Instead, the Seabees would do two tours! I was a Steelworker. *'Where was that recruiter?'* There was sheer anxiety after the last leg of island hopping. As we approached our destination I wondered if we would be greeted by a hail of bullets getting off the plane.

We arrived safely. We either worked to erect Butler buildings and wooden huts or guarded the perimeter against attack. So it went on - month after month through the Monsoon rains and mud. Then the rains stopped but the work continued. Twelve hours a day and only six hours on Sunday. Then the

Heat came and it never let up. Through it all, we were emotionally sustained by the thoughts of our loved ones back in the States - the *World* as we called it. Mail from home was the only thing that could temporarily stave off the oppressive homesickness and loneliness. Even a letter from a stranger was cherished.

Still, for many of us came the infamous 'Dear John ... ' There was nothing anyone could do except read it a hundred times as if the words would change. There were attacks. 81 mm rockets crashed in on us from the sky in the middle of the night and there were casualties. The 'Dear John letter came for me as well. I felt angered but motivated to survive through this war. For me there would be no Rand R. I saved my combat and hazardous pay. It all seems silly now but my dream was to return to the States and buy a brand new convertible just so I could drive by my ex-girlfriend while she waited for the bus and not bother to offer a ride. It all seems vague as well. I survived the first tour and returned home to Philadelphia, Pa. While on a thirty-day leave I bought a 1967 yellow Mustang convertible and drove it back to Gulfport.

In the near future loomed that second tour to Vietnam. It was more than 40 years ago. I can no longer distinguish events from the first trip from the events of last. There is one exception of course. The wooden huts in which we lived were all sequentially numbered. Hut #38 is where I called home. But in the early morning hours of August 23rd 1968, I was awakened by the unforgettable sounds on incoming rounds of artillery. We were being attacked. We crammed into the mortar holes that were covered by steel plates and sandbags. We heard the rockets whistling through the night, the thud of them striking the ground and the red hot shrapnel flying through the air. Huts 37 and 39 took direct hits. I remember Arthur Lloyd Adams Jr. who practiced cracking a bull whip around the camp to break the boredom, David Allen Fleskes who was only about 17 years and had only been in the Republic of Vietnam for about two months. and Daniel Joseph Bermingham who loved to play the guitar and sang "The Sound of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkel a day before all three men died in that mortar attack

Hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk to you again.

I downloaded the song on my iPod. When it plays, it is the voice and face of Daniel Bermingham that I hear and I'm haunted by the fact that I survived that night. Still, there are faces and names that I remember. I've been fortunate enough to have made contact with some of the young men that I served with. Others I would love to find again. Where is *Steward Francis Bishop* from Albany, New York He was the toughest little fighting Seabee in the Battalion. And *Joseph Love* from Kittyhawk, North Carolina. He was good worker when he was sober (and funny as hell when he was drunk). To Donald Latiolas, I owe you an apology. Sadly, most of these men I will never see again but I pray that they are all doing well.

I studied and earned my High School diploma during that second tour. I even earned some college credits before getting my honorable discharge. As I mentioned before, mail was precious to personnel serving their country. I later married a pen pal. In 1971 and joined the Philadelphia Police Force in 1973. I was promoted to Detective and Sergeant. I worked as an instructor at the Police Academy, Internal Affairs and Detective divisions. While working as a cop, I graduated from Temple University and earned college degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology. I retired from the Police Department 31 years later. I have one son and one daughter. My first grandchild is on the way. Currently, I'm employed as the Program Chair for Criminal Justice at ITT Technical Institute.

Many of us were just kids back then and we didn't always get along. We are older, more mature and hopefully wiser now. I now look back fondly on the SEABEES as a ***band of brothers***. The SEABEES! We busted our butts for our country. Where are you now?

SW-3 GLENN
WILLIAMS

